



## Pick Your Path to Health

### The Battle Against Tobacco Advertising

Joyce Howard, 47, remembers the first time she inhaled cigarette smoke and embarked on a 33-year habit.

She was 14 and surrounded by a group of classmates in a church after-school program. The Washington, D.C., native watched as girl after girl puffed and passed the cigarette. "One girl showed me how to inhale and hold the smoke in," Howard said. "I felt dizzy, but I thought it gave me an adult look. I felt more aggressive."

Howard said that feeling of power came primarily from tobacco advertising. "Kools were on TV, so that's what me and my sister smoked and those ads had a big influence on me," she recalls. "We thought we would be cool smoking Kools. Everybody in my age group at that time was smoking Kools."

Howard is not alone. Nearly all first-use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation, and adolescents who smoke regularly go on to become adult smokers. In fact, a 1994 study of 6-year-olds in day-care settings in Atlanta and Augusta, Georgia, found that 90 percent were already able to match the Old Joe (Camel) logo to cigarettes.

Targeting minorities and women is a key strategy used by tobacco marketers to build sales, and unfortunately it works. According to the recent *Surgeon General's Report on Women and Smoking*, some 21.9 percent of African American women smoke compared to 23.5 percent of white women. A 1986 survey showed the most popular cigarette brands among adult African American smokers were Newport, Kool, and Salem. More than 20 percent of Kool's advertising budget is targeted to African American communities, though blacks are only about 13 percent of the population.

Watch out for the tobacco industry's tactics. They know what appeals to women. In an R.J. Reynolds internal document from 1983, it is said that women respond to ad images that involve intimacy, loving, caring, gentleness, closeness, and tenderness. Another document that year noted that women smoke to indicate passage into adulthood. Other advertising campaigns play on a woman's desire to control her weight and urge women to "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet." In the 1920s, this

positioning by Lucky Strike led to a 312 percent increase in sales during the first year of this campaign.

In 1968, Philip Morris touted Virginia Slims as the brand to smoke if you were in tune to the women's movement. Who can forget "You've come a long way, Baby"? In the mid-90s, "It's a woman thing," was surpassed by "Find your voice," complete with beautiful photos of African American women which implied that women of different racial and ethnic groups have unique needs for self-expression. Other ad strategies appeal to the stylish and sophisticated woman or promote fashion accessories.

The African-American community has paid dearly for tobacco advertising. Each year, about 45,000 African Americans die from a preventable smoking-related disease, such as lung cancer, heart disease, and stroke. According to the American Cancer Society, lung cancer is the leading cancer killer of African-American women. This year, an estimated 7,600 lung cancer cases are expected among African American women and 6,300 women will die of the disease. The *Surgeon General's Report on Women and Smoking* suggests that African American women may be more sensitive than white women to the addictive nature of nicotine - possibly because they smoke cigarettes with higher nicotine content or inhale more deeply.

"Fighting to restrict tobacco advertising aimed at women and youth, particularly African Americans, is an advocacy priority of the American Cancer Society," said Tia Mason, American Cancer Society's Communications Manager. Unfortunately, tobacco advertising is able to hide behind free speech protection. In *Lorillard Tobacco Co. v. Attorney General Reilly of Massachusetts*, the United States Supreme Court supported the tobacco industry's position when it overturned a Massachusetts law banning billboard advertising of cigarettes near schools and playgrounds. "The implication is that it creates a greater challenge to restrict tobacco advertising in communities, particularly minority communities," Mason said.

Mason says the most important thing people can do is to push for more legislation against tobacco advertising. The American Cancer Society Action Network is a free program that offers sample letters to editors and congressional members, and contacts for lawmakers. The program also offers community involvement tips.

Howard still fights her nicotine addiction daily. She said she is still afraid of the health risks and is trying to quit. "If the advertising wasn't there, and

specifically for young blacks, many of us wouldn't have started smoking," said Howard.

Don't become a victim of the multi-million dollar advertising campaigns for tobacco. Being aware of their tactics will help you stay on a smokeless path to better health.

#### Tip Box: Fight Tobacco Advertising

- The American Cancer Society Action Network; (877) 234-4484.
- National Coalition for Women Against Tobacco;  
[www.womenagainst.org](http://www.womenagainst.org) or (703) 838-0500.
- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids; [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org).
- The American Lung Association; (202) 682-5864 or  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org).

National Women's Health Information Center; (800) 994-WOMAN, TDD at (888) 220-5446 or [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov).

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign or to subscribe to the listserv to receive tips on improving your health, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD at 1-888-220-5446 or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov>. This article was developed through a partnership between the Office on Women's Health and the Wellness Warriors Network.*